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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT  
I n 3 H h

Subject: "THE ROAST MEAT THERMOMETER - AN ECONOMICAL PIECE OF EQUIPMENT."  
Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Magazines certainly have good looking food advertisements these days. Especially the ads done in color.

This month's issue of a popular woman's magazine had a picture of a rib roast that looked real enough to eat. A rich brown it was -- glittering with juiciness, the fat on the top a brownish yellow and somewhat crisp. A young bride I know gazed at the picture and sighed. Her roasts never came out like that, she said. No matter how carefully she watched the clock and the oven thermometer, the meat was sure to be overcooked or else practically raw in the middle. And her husband couldn't abide raw meat. Neither did he approve of a roast that had most of the juice cooked out of it. Roast beef medium was the only kind fit to eat in his opinion.

Well, I wasn't going to stand calmly by and see their married happiness threatened by a mere matter of roasting technique. So I set out to find for her if there was any way of taking the guesswork out of cooking roasts.

And believe it or not -- I learned that there IS an ab-so-lutely sure way of getting a roast done to the particular stage which is most acceptable to you personally.

And I've no less authority for my statement than Lucy Alexander, head of the meat testing laboratories in the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington. Now Miss Alexander has been cooking meats for the last 11 years. I'm told that she has been known to do as many as 48 roasts a week. And counting all the pork, beef, and lamb -- she has cooked more than 7,000 pieces of meat in those 11 years.

So you can see that Miss Alexander knows her roasts. Well, she says that any pan big enough to hold your meat and catch the drippings is all right to use for a roaster. Of course, since the cuts are tender to begin with you don't want to use a roaster cover. Covers are only for pot roasts - for the tough cuts that have to be subjected to steam to make them tender.

The things that DO count in handling roasts are proper timing and temperature. Your cookbook, if it is a very up-to-date one, probably tells you to cook your roast so many minutes to the pound at so many degrees Fahrenheit.

But even if you follow those instructions you are not always assured of having your roast just the way you want it. In the first place no two roasts are exactly alike. Take beef roasts. Suppose you and your next door neighbor each have a 6-pound roast from the same animal. But yours is a standing rib roast and she has hers made into a rolled rib roast.



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Well, it's obvious that in two hours the two roasts won't be at just the same stage of doneness even if your ovens are held at the same temperature.

And yet I said a few minutes ago that there IS a way to take the guess-work out of roasting. And I'm not going back on my statement. The roast meat thermometer is the answer to the cook's prayer for guidance. It is the ONLY way of knowing what is happening to the middle of a roast.

Roast meat thermometers aren't new. They've been used in experimental cookery for more than 35 years. But only within the last 10 years has there been a meat thermometer for home use. Today even the mail order houses sell it.

Now having a roast meat thermometer doesn't mean you no longer need pay any attention to the clock or the oven indicators. You still need to have some idea of the length of time to have your roast in the oven.

Suppose you have a 6-pound rolled rib roast. You know that the oven heat should be 350 degrees or thereabouts most of the time; so you heat it to that temperature. Furthermore your cookbook says that A roast takes 25 minutes to the pound to reach the medium stage. You well know that's mighty vague, for "a roast" lumps standing rib roasts with the compact rolled rib roasts. And from your own experience you know that a rolled roast takes between 10 and 15 minutes a pound more cooking than does a standing rib roast.

Nevertheless, fortified by your roast meat thermometer, you go ahead -- estimating the time at 30 minutes to the pound and do your multiplying. Six pounds -- 30 minutes to the pound for medium. That's 180 minutes -- 3 hours. Even if it IS only an approximate figure it gives you something to go by. Then suppose after your rolled rib roast has been in the oven 2 hours, you look in at it. You see that the column in the roast thermometer has risen until it is nearly at the point which shows the inside has reached the rare stage. You see that the roast is getting along a little too rapidly so you turn the heat down.

To sum it all up, cookbook rules as to timing and oven temperatures, and oven thermometers, are all valuable aids to the person preparing a roast. But the roast meat thermometer supplies the missing link of information. It is the instrument which safeguards a roast both against overcooking and undercooking. With its aid you hold shrinkage down to moderate proportions and get your money's worth of servings.

As you yourself know, the more thoroughly you cook a roast, the greater its loss of weight. If you want your meat well done, you know you're going to get it to that stage at the cost of more loss of weight than if you called it finished at the rare stage. And so it's all the more important not to cook the roast any longer than necessary to have it be at this desired stage.

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